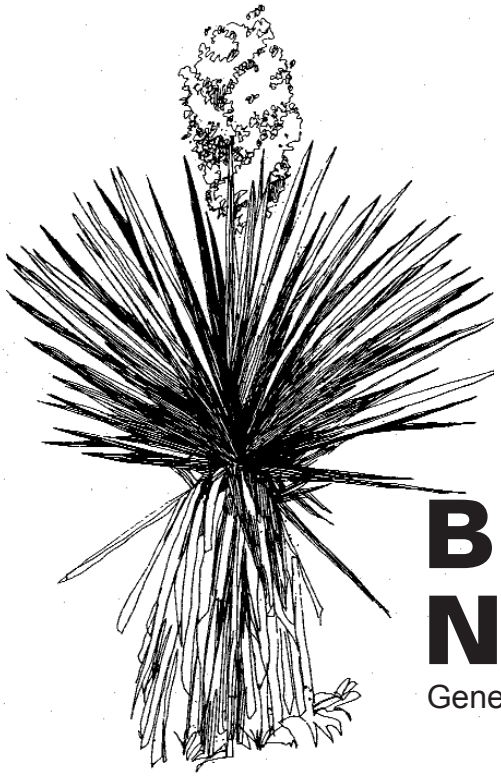


Big Bend National Park

General Management Plan / Newsletter 2, Summer 2001

Dear Friends:

We are pleased to share this *General Management Plan* newsletter with you and ask for your continued help in planning the future of Big Bend National Park. As a reminder, general management plans provide guidance for overall management of each national park. This process requires that we develop a range of possible alternative future conditions and management strategies for the park. The plan will determine how the park will address resource preservation, visitor uses, development needs, and information/education issues for the next 10 to 15 years.

This newsletter is the first opportunity for you to respond to preliminary alternatives. Your comments and suggestions will help in developing a preferred alternative, which will be published in a *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* that will be made available for a formal review and comment period.

Your participation is important to us, and we urge your continued involvement in this planning effort.

Sincerely,

Frank J. Deckert
Superintendent
Big Bend National Park

Planning Steps

Steps	Planning Activity	What You Can Do
1	**Project Startup.** Assemble planning team and design the process for carrying out the project. *(Winter 1999)*	
2	**Identify the Planning Context.** Reaffirm the purpose, significance, and mission of the park, determine issues and concerns, and gather and analyze information. *(Spring-Summer 2000)*	• Read newsletter and send us your comments. • Attend public meetings.
3	**Develop and Evaluate Alternatives.** Develop a reasonable range of alternative future conditions and management. *(Fall 2000 – Summer 2001)*	• Read newsletter and send us your comments.
4	**Prepare and Publish the Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS).** The draft document will be distributed for public review. It will describe the planning context, management alternatives, and impacts. *(Summer – Winter 2001)*	• Read draft plan and send us your comments. • Attend public meetings.
5	**Revise and Publish the Final GMP/EIS.** Appropriate changes will be made to the draft document based on public comments, environmental analysis, and other information. The final GMP/EIS will be distributed. *(Spring – Fall 2002)*	
6	**Implement the GMP.** After a record of decision is issued, the management directions in the plan will be carried out as funding allows. *(Winter 2002 – Beyond)*	

How the Planning Process Progresses

GATHERING INFORMATION AND GETTING READY

Before alternatives for managing the park were developed, information on the park's resources, visitor use, and visitor preferences was gathered and analyzed. Information was solicited about the issues and the scope of the project from the public and the park staff through newsletters, meetings, and personal contacts.

Four decision points were identified during the scoping process. These points are the questions that each alternative needs to answer. They are as follows:

- Considering opportunities available outside the park, what kind of opportunities for experiences do we want visitors to have in various areas of the park while preserving the integrity of the park's natural and cultural resources?
- Air and water quality are declining in the park. How can the park develop effective strategies to improve air quality and water quality and quantity, which are largely beyond its control?
- What are the best ways to foster a cross border relationship with Mexico?
- What is the best way to protect the viewshed from within the park and the resources of the Christmas Mountains?

DEFINING THE INTERPRETIVE THEMES

"Interpretation" is the National Park Service's word for the art of explaining the park's natural, cultural, and historical resources to visitors so they have an understanding of why the park was set aside by Congress. The primary interpretive themes define information that every visitor should know about the area.

Interpretive themes are ideas, concepts, or stories that are central to the park's purpose, identity, and visitor experience. Primary themes provide the framework for the park's interpretation and educational programs, influence the desired visitor experience, and provide direction for planners and people who design the park's exhibits, publications, and audiovisual programs. Below are the draft primary themes and subthemes.

1 Big Bend National Park's varied ecosystems – mountain, desert, and river – support an extraordinary richness of biological diversity.

- Although it appears harsh and barren, the Chihuahuan Desert is home to many plants and animals (some found nowhere else in the world) that use ingenious physical adaptations and behavioral strategies to overcome heat and drought stress.
- The park's location along a major biological corridor for bird migration on the US-Mexico border enable birdwatchers to see more varieties of bird species than in any other national park, as well as some Mexican species seldom seen anywhere else in the United States.
- The Chisos Mountains, the only complete mountain range found in a national park, stand as a mountain island surrounded by a desert sea, providing cooler, wetter habitat for species unable to survive in the hotter, drier desert. Relict species found in the Chisos Mountains today indicate what the climate and landscape over a broader area were like thousands of years ago. Many species are not found elsewhere in the United States.
- Big Bend National Park provides valuable habitat for several endangered and threatened species of plants and animals, and the park's protected status greatly aids in the preservation, study, and recovery of many of these species.
- The periodic occurrence of fire is a natural process in several of the ecosystems of Big Bend and is a necessary element in maintaining the overall health of these systems.
- Although they are seldom seen, the animals of the desert have become highly adapted and take full advantage of scarce available resources.
- The rich plant life in Big Bend represents the diversity of the Chihuahuan Desert and provided food, medicine, clothing, textiles, and tools for people of many cultures who have lived here.

2 The abundance and diversity of geologic features seen in the park allow visitors, students, and scientists to learn about the geologic processes that formed this area and apply these patterns to geologic events seen around the world.

- The outstanding fossils uncovered in Big Bend National Park make this one of the premier national parks for paleontological discoveries, and continue to provide clues to the past climate, flora, and fauna of this region.

3 Major resource threats such as air and water pollution, intrusive sounds, the presence of exotic plant and animal species as well as activities by visitors such as vandalism, graffiti and the illegal collection of plants and animals negatively impact both the resources of the park and the visitor experience.

- Big Bend National Park provides visitors with incredibly clear views of the night sky, unobstructed by light pollution.
- Through stargazing, visitors learn how early cultures relied on the night sky for critical survival information and about current air and light pollution issues.
- Big Bend is a mandatory class I air quality area under the Clean Air Act, meaning that very little degradation of air quality is acceptable. Both particulate and visibility aspects of air quality have been monitored since 1978. Big Bend is part of a large-scale air resource protection program to determine the potential impact of local and distant pollutant sources on the area.
- An important part of the NPS mission is to preserve and/or restore the natural resources of the parks, including the natural soundscapes associated with units of the national park system. Intrusive sounds are also a matter of concern to park visitors. Big Bend is relatively free of intrusive sounds and strives to preserve the natural soundscape.
- Exotic plants and animals are extremely disruptive to park ecosystems. At Big Bend, natural resource managers work to prevent introduction of exotic species and to remove established exotic species.

4 Though rarely seen, water constitutes the most important resource in the Chihuahuan Desert environment. Water is the architect of the desert, and its presence or absence affects the desert's appearance, plant and animal life, and the ways that humans can use it.

- The ruins at Castolon and Rio Grande Village provide evidence that the river has historically been a focal point of life in Big Bend.

- The Rio Grande is a source of life-giving water for the inhabitants of the Big Bend region, but there are also serious threats to its water quality and quantity.

- Big Bend is a land of limited water. Water conservation, alternatives to mitigate the historic effects of man on the flow regime, evaluation of flood hazards in developed or frequently visited areas, and monitoring and managing water quality for the health and safety of park visitors and ecosystems are underway.

5 The physical evidence left behind by different cultural groups over several thousand years, including American Indians, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Anglo-American settlers, gives us clues to the past and helps us imagine what life was like for these early inhabitants of Big Bend.

- Big Bend National Park contains many outstanding archeological and historical sites and provides visitors with the chance to see how early inhabitants and later settlers lived.

- Settlers engaged in a number of occupations, including farming, ranching, and mining, to make a living.

- American troops were stationed at several locations at various times throughout what is now the park from mid-nineteenth century until the conclusion of the Mexican Border Conflict in 1920. These soldiers, including African American Buffalo Soldiers from 1885-90, protected settlers from hostile Indians, border raids and bandits.

- How did these various groups adapt to the desert environment, what was their interaction and interdependence, and what was the cumulative effect of the human presence on the developing desert environment?

6 The Maderas del Carmen Protected Area in Coahuila and the Cañon de Santa Elena Protected Area in Chihuahua are two Mexican federally protected areas adjacent to Big Bend National Park. Together with Big Bend Ranch State Park, these four areas preserve millions of acres of important habitat, protect biological corridors for wildlife migration, and provide unique opportunities for the United States and Mexico to harmoniously coexist and work together to preserve a common ecosystem.

7 Big Bend National Park provides an excellent outdoor laboratory for researchers to study the natural world, the interactions that occur within, and the impacts of both natural events and human activity.

8 In addition to the National Park Service, the state of Texas, its citizens, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and other entities were instrumental in the creation and development of Big Bend National Park and in preserving its resources.

9 The legacy of human impacts on Big Bend National Park's varied environments exhibits changes from past to present including; soil erosion, watershed impairment, grasslands decline and species reduction.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE GOALS

The following are preliminary visitor experience goals that will be further modified and refined as planning moves forward. These goals help establish the type of experience that is desirable for visitors and serve as a guide for developing a range of management approaches. The National Park Service will provide opportunities for visitors to

- learn about Big Bend without physically visiting the park
- feel welcome, respected, and able to offer suggestions
- safely enjoy park resources
- access facilities regardless of physical abilities
- experience clean and well-maintained facilities
- visit a park visitor center and talk to a knowledgeable ranger or volunteer
- interact with park employees and other visitors
- have access to differing points of view on issues affecting the park
- learn and practice low-impact uses in the park
- learn about the park by attending professional interpretive programs
- learn some of the complex natural processes that helped to shape Big Bend

- receive exceptional customer service
- experience solitude
- experience the natural world without the intrusions of modern life
- experience views as far as the eye can see without evidence of humans in the landscape
- view the incredible Big Bend night sky without obstruction from light pollution
- see plants and animals in their natural settings
- experience the richness of biological diversity in the park
- visit a historic site and see how early inhabitants of this area lived
- make self-discoveries and establish a connection to park resources
- experience Mexican culture by visiting one of the border towns adjacent to the park
- contemplate their own roles and responsibilities in the stewardship of natural and cultural resources
- enjoy a variety of appropriate recreational opportunities compatible with the protection of park resources

DEFINING MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS

The planning team developed six management prescriptions (zones) for the park – visitor services, operations, recreation, wilderness, backcountry nonwilderness, and cultural. Each management prescription has a particular combination of visitor experience, resource conditions, and facilities and activities that could take place in that particular area. Each alternative concept will have a different application or configuration of these management prescriptions. These management prescriptions help the general management plan planning team put the alternative concepts "on the ground." For example, if one alternative was to develop more sites for visitor use and activities, you would see more areas zoned for recreation and visitor services for that particular alternative. If another alternative calls for limiting visitor use and recreation, you would see more areas of the park zoned as either wilderness or backcountry nonwilderness depending on the uses and facilities needed. The location of facilities may be different for one alternative than another depending on each alternative's overall concept. The management prescriptions for each alternative are shown on the draft alternative maps.

ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS

The information gathered aided in developing three preliminary *concepts* (action alternatives B, C, and D) for managing the park for the next 10 to 15 years. Alternative A, a "no-action" alternative, describes a continuation of existing conditions and is presented to serve as a basis for comparing the other alternatives. The concepts were developed from a desire to provide a variety of visitor experiences and levels of resource protection. All the action alternative concepts support the park's purpose and significance, address issues, avoid unacceptable resource impacts, respond to public wishes and concerns, and meet the park's long-term goals.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVES AND PUBLIC INPUT

With the management prescriptions for each alternative defined, the next step in the process was adding more detail to each alternative. Comments from the public scoping meetings held during the spring, along with input from the park's management and staff, were considered in developing the alternatives.

Some of the public comments received reached beyond the scope of a general management plan, suggesting specific solutions to problems. These are valuable ideas, and we will refer to them when we reach future planning stages. For example, specific interpretive needs would be detailed in a comprehensive interpretive plan.

Other comments revolved around things that we must do regardless of planning initiatives. Because much of basic park management is specified in laws, policies, and mandates, issues that fall into this category will not be addressed in the alternatives. We strive to meet these mandates regardless of the alternatives that are developed.

EVALUATING ALTERNATIVES

The preliminary no-action alternative (A) and three action alternatives (B, C, and D) follow the description of the management prescriptions. The existing conditions alternative (A) will help you compare the effects of the action alternatives to a continuation of the status quo. To fully understand each alternative, please refer to the description of each management prescription.

Big Bend Management Prescriptions

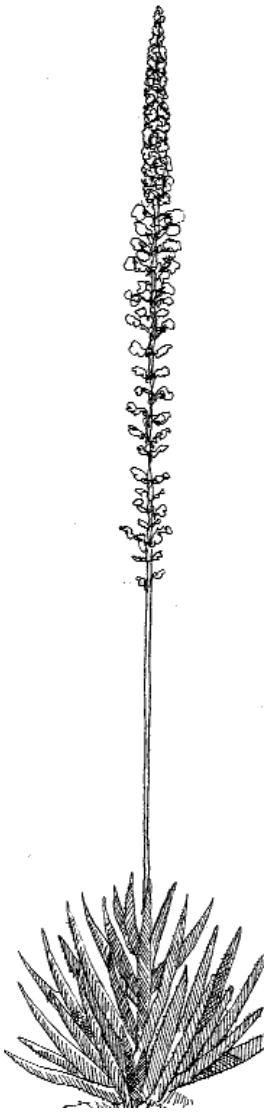
Visitor Services

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The visitor experience in this area would be highly social and focused on interpretation, education, orientation, visitor comfort, and safety. This structured environment would be highly accessible, and contacts with park staff and other visitors would be common; overcrowding would be avoided. Visitors would have an opportunity to get an overview of park resources in a short time with a minimum of physical exertion. An opportunity to learn about the park's significance and compelling stories through the interpretation of themes would be an important element. Visitors would have an opportunity to purchase materials related to the park. Necessary food and lodging would be available here.

RESOURCE CONDITIONS

To the greatest degree practical in this management prescription, facilities would be models of best management practices and sustainable development. This prescription would be where there are limited or no significant resources or in areas that were previously disturbed by development. The natural environment could be modified for park operations, but it would still harmonize with the surrounding environment. Although the environment could be highly modified within the area, pollutants and other disturbances (e.g., storm-water runoff and dust from construction) would be contained and mitigated before affecting adjoining areas. The physical footprint of structures and stored material in this area would be minimized. Archeological resources would be avoided or mitigated if necessary.



FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Sightseeing, learning about the park through interpretive media, self-guided and ranger-led tours, short walks, and programs could be common activities. The area also would serve as a staging area for more extended tours. Orientation and interpretation facilities such as visitor centers, kiosks, wayside exhibits, and other interpretive media would be appropriate. Support facilities such as fee collection, restrooms, running water, first-aid areas, and hardened circulation areas and trails could be present. Recreation facilities such as developed campgrounds might be available. Space could be available for research, classroom activities, and libraries. Utilities would include water, electricity, telephones, and computer access.

Operations

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

This area is not intended for visitors; however, limited incidental visitor use would be permitted. Most visitors would be only slightly aware of the facilities in this area during their visits.

RESOURCE CONDITIONS

To the greatest degree practical, facilities in this management prescription would be models of best management practices and sustainable development. This prescription would be where there are limited or no significant resources or in areas that were previously disturbed by development. The natural environment could be modified for park operations, but facilities would still harmonize with the surrounding environment. Although the environment could be highly modified in this area, pollutants and other disturbances (e.g., storm-water runoff and dust from construction) would be contained and mitigated before affecting adjoining areas. Facilities and operations in the area would be buffered to avoid visitors seeing them or being disturbed by associated noise. The physical footprint of structures and stored material in this area would be minimized. Archeological resources would be avoided or mitigated if necessary.

FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

The area could include structures and grounds used for administration and operations, such as offices, maintenance shops, storage areas, warehouses, garages, research facilities, conference/meeting/training facilities, housing, boat and equipment storage, vehicle maintenance, and outdoor storage. Facilities for park utilities and communication needs would be located in this area. Facilities would provide a safe, efficient, comfortable, and aesthetic work environment for park staff. Hardened circulation and parking areas would be appropriate in this area as well as service roads and boat launch areas for operations activities. Housing would have sufficient space for family activities.

Big Bend Management Prescriptions

Recreation

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Visitors could enjoy many appropriate recreational experiences. Social and group activities would result in a high degree of contact with other visitors. Visitors would have occasional contact with park staff conducting patrols and doing other work assignments. Visitors would have safe, accessible, and enjoyable experiences that have a very high probability of meeting their expectations.

RESOURCE CONDITIONS

Recreation would take place where there would be minimal impacts on resources. Resource manipulation would vary by the amount and intensity of physical development necessary for particular types of recreation. Some recreation would cause incidental damage to natural resources; other recreational activities, like fishing, would consume natural resources within the constraints of applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Visitors could participate in a wide variety of activities including watching wildlife, camping, hiking, walking, jogging, and bicycling. Facilities could include picnic tables and grills, campsites, accessible restrooms, and paved and unpaved roads and parking.

Wilderness

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

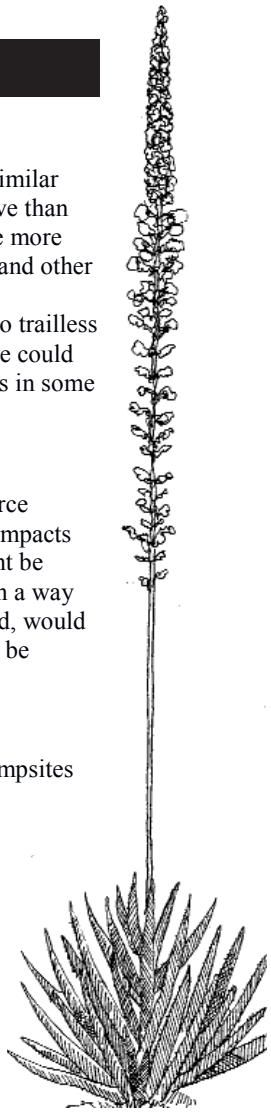
Wilderness management would be coordinated with the backcountry nonwilderness prescription and similar experiences would be provided. However, management strategies and options would be more restrictive than under the nonwilderness prescription. Visitors would use these areas for day and overnight use. On the more popular trails, there would be a moderate probability of encountering others, particularly at campsites and other points of interest. Visitors would be influenced less by other human activities than they would in the nonwilderness prescription area. Travel would be along a range of routes from well-maintained trails to trailless backcountry requiring a high degree of of outdoor skills and self-reliance. Use levels might vary. There could be limits on the number of campers. There might be established primitive campsites and other facilities in some locations. Hiking, camping and stock use would be permitted.

RESOURCE CONDITIONS

Natural conditions would be mostly undisturbed, but evidence of visitor use might be apparent. Resource impacts would be primarily from hiking, camping, stock use, and allowable administrative activities. Impacts would be reversible, although areas might take many years to recover. Previously disturbed areas might be restored. Resource conditions might be modified for essential visitor and operational needs, but only in a way that harmonizes with the setting and retains natural biodiversity. Archeological resources, if discovered, would generally be left in place. Historic buildings and sites might be preserved and stabilized, or they might be recorded and removed.

FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Facilities could include maintained trails, footbridges, directional signs, and primitive campsites. If campsites were designated, they might contain primitive toilets and food storage lockers.



Big Bend Management Prescriptions

Backcountry Nonwilderness

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

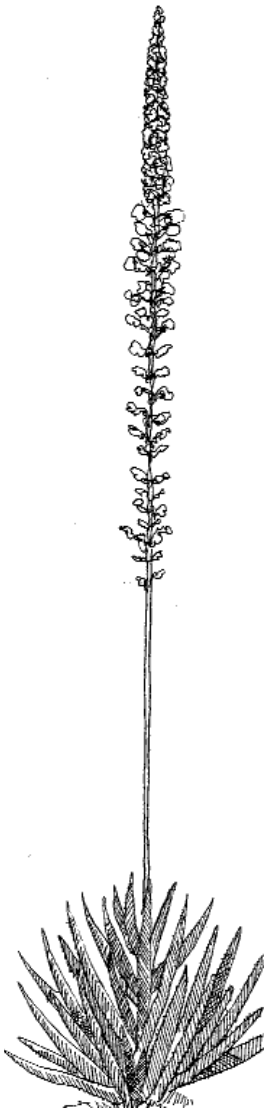
Backcountry nonwilderness management would be coordinated with the wilderness prescription and similar experiences would be provided. However, management strategies and options would be less restrictive than under the wilderness prescription. Visitors would use these areas for day and overnight use. On the more popular trails, there would be a moderate probability of encountering others, particularly at campsites and points of interest. Visitors would be influenced by other human activities more than they would in the wilderness prescription area. Travel would be along a range of routes from well-maintained trails to trailless backcountry requiring a high degree of outdoor skills and self-reliance. Use levels might vary. There would be limits on the number of campers. There might be established campsites, food storage containers, and toilets in some locations. Hiking, camping, and stock use would be permitted.

RESOURCE CONDITIONS

Natural conditions would be mostly undisturbed, but evidence of visitor and administrative use might be apparent. Resource impacts would be restricted to hiking and stock use, campsites, and approved administrative facilities and activities. Past impacts would be reversible, although areas might require intensive effort and long periods to recover. Resource conditions might be modified for necessary visitor and operational needs, but in a manner that would minimize visual and resource impacts.

FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Facilities might include maintained trails, unpaved backcountry roads, footbridges, interpretive and directional signs, primitive campsites, administrative roads, and administrative equipment (such as wells or radio repeaters). If campsites were designated, they might contain facilities such as toilets and food storage lockers.



Cultural

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Visitors would be immersed in a cultural setting that reflects a historical period with minimal exposure to modern intrusions, both visible and audible. Visitors could explore sites on their own or participate in ranger-conducted programs. Recreational activities would be managed to support the area's historic character. Some areas may be closed to visitors to protect resources and resource values.

RESOURCE CONDITIONS

Intensive management of cultural landscapes highlighting the historical period would occur. Structure exteriors would be preserved; interiors would be preserved for interpretation or adaptively used for park and visitor support needs. Cultural sites inventories will be completed. Archeological and ethnographic resources would be protected and preserved.

FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Interpretive exhibits, programs, demonstrations, and tours could take place in these areas. Historic structures and settings would be key features. There would be limited visitor amenities through adaptive use of historic structures (sales, restrooms, water fountains, etc.) and limited administrative supports (staff offices, storage, housing, etc.).

The Alternative Concepts

Alternative A – Existing Conditions / No Action

This alternative, presented for comparison with the action alternatives B, C, and D, continues current management direction, and there would be no significant change in interpretation and management of the park. Coordination would continue with agencies and other groups.

There would be very little change or improvement of visitor facilities except for the following. A new building would be constructed at Panther Junction that would consolidate functions now occurring in other locations. This structure would be more sustainable and efficient than current scattered operations. The facilities at Panther Junction would continue to increase slowly over the coming years to meet park needs. The park would upgrade the utility systems (water and sewer) throughout the park to meet Texas compliance requirements.

Cultural and natural resources would be managed as time and funding allowed. The park would continue to protect and maintain known resources. Cultural and natural resource inventory work and monitoring would continue and be expanded if possible. Park staff would encourage the research that is needed to fill in the gaps.

Alternative B – Enhance Natural Resource Stewardship and Visitor Facilities While Increasing Opportunities for Cultural Resource Appreciation

Concept

This alternative would provide better protection for the park's natural resources and upgrade park facilities. The park would preserve and interpret the tangible remains of ranching and other human activities in West Texas in several locations throughout the park such as Wilson Blue Creek Ranch, Harte Ranch and Mariscal Mine.

Actions

■ **Chisos Basin**
- Keep existing development in the basin and provide no additional facility development.
- Upgrade all utility systems (water, wastewater, and power) and underground all utilities.
- Rehabilitate and make all facilities more energy efficient.

■ **Panther Junction**
- Upgrade and improve utility systems (water, wastewater, and power).
- Upgrade visitor services at Panther Junction and maintain development including post office and school.
- Retain park personnel at current levels.
- Manage the largest portion of the area following the operations prescription and the area around the visitor center following the visitor services prescription.

■ **Castolon**
- Develop new campground and amphitheater in mesquite flat or southeast along the river; remove current campground and amphitheater.
- Relocate concessions housing out of historic district.

■ **Rio Grande Village**
- Relocate the gas station and store outside the 500-year floodplain.
- Relocate or remove some campsites to provide for better resource protection and visitor safety.
- Continue irrigation of the campground and associated areas.
- Evaluate the Barker House to determine if the structure meets the National Register of Historic Places criteria. If this structure is determined eligible, then undertake preservation measures.

■ **Harte Ranch**
- Manage area to preserve the tangible remains of West Texas ranching, including the preservation of structures around Buttrill Spring, Mountain Lodge, Bone Spring, and other sites associated with ranching.
- Maintain the landing strip and other facilities for park operations.
- Manage most land in Harte Ranch area following the backcountry nonwilderness prescription.
- Manage some west and south sections of the Hart Ranch area following the wilderness prescription.

■ **Christmas Mountains**
- Encourage the Texas General Land Office to find a buyer for the land who would manage it to be compatible with park purposes.

Alternative C – Providing for Natural Resource Stewardship and Preservation While Creating a More Sustainable Park

Concept

This alternative would provide better protection for the park's natural resources than the no-action alternative and upgrade park facilities. Actions would be taken to help make the park more sustainable. This means that park facility design would sit lightly upon the land demonstrating resource efficiency, and promoting ecology restoration and integrity. It further means that the park would make those choices, decisions, and actions that would best achieve ecological/biological diversity.

Actions

■ **Chisos Basin**
- Remove all concession and park facilities from Chisos Basin except for campground and two residences for law enforcement and maintenance.
- Develop a day-use trailhead in the basin using areas that are already disturbed.
- Relocate the lodge and concession operations to an area between Basin Junction and Panther Junction. If this action were not feasible, then permit no concession lodging in the park.

■ **Panther Junction**
- Expand visitor center to best interpret the park's natural and cultural material.
- Move up to 15% of park personnel and functions to gateway communities. Place those functions not needed at the park on a daily basis outside park boundaries.
- Upgrade and improve utility systems (water, wastewater, and power) and visitor services.
- Retain post office.
- Manage the largest portion of the area following the operations prescription and the area around the visitor center following the visitor services prescription.

■ **Castolon**
- Develop new campground and amphitheater in mesquite flat or southeast along the river; remove current campground and amphitheater.
- Relocate concessions housing out of historic district.

■ **Rio Grande Village**
- Relocate campsite facilities and certain park support facilities such as visitor center and housing outside the 100-year floodplain.
- Relocate the gas station, store, and park support facilities such as maintenance outside the 500-year floodplain, possibly at the junction of the road to Boquillas.
- Reduce park facilities to a total of five residences (three for maintenance and two for law enforcement).
- If sufficient space can be identified, develop additional campsites.
- Allow limited recreational overnight parking.
- Reduce the irrigation of the campground and associated areas up to 50% with priority given to maintaining trees for shade.
- Preserve the Barker House.
- Manage most of the Rio Grande Village area following the backcounty nonwilderness prescription.
- Reduce concessions facilities to two residences.

■ **Harte Ranch**
- Designate a substantial portion of Harte Ranch for a wilderness study and manage it following the wilderness prescription. Exclude the county road, landing strip with surrounding buildings, and mountain lodge from this study.
- Allow the remaining structures to deteriorate in place; if necessary for visitor safety, remove them.
- Manage most land in the Harte Ranch area following the wilderness prescription.

■ **Parkwide**
- Develop in situ display of paleontological resources and improve fossil bone exhibit.

■ **Christmas Mountains**
- Encourage the Texas General Land Office to find a buyer for the land who would manage it to be compatible with park purposes.

Alternative D – Maximize Natural Resource Stewardship and Preservation of the Park for Future Generations

Concept

This alternative would provide for the enduring protection and preservation of the park's natural resources. Actions would be undertaken to give greater resource protection while allowing for visitor use.

Actions

■ **Chisos Basin**
- Remove all concession and park facilities from Chisos Basin.
- Develop a day use trailhead.

- Permit no concession lodging in the park; encourage the private sector to develop lodging facilities outside park boundaries.
- Manage most of the Chisos Basin following the backcountry nonwilderness prescription.

■ **Panther Junction**
- Move up to 15% of park personnel and functions to gateway communities. Place those functions not needed on a daily basis outside park boundaries.
- Upgrade and improve utility systems (water, wastewater, and power) and visitor services.
- Retain post office.
- Manage the largest portion of the area following the operations prescription and the area around the visitor center following the visitor services prescription.

■ **Castolon**
- Develop new campground and amphitheater in mesquite flat or southeast along the river; remove current campground and amphitheater.
- Relocate concessions housing out of historic district.

■ **Rio Grande Village**
- Remove the gas station, store, visitor center, campsites, and park support facilities at Rio Grande Village and revegetate most of the area.
- Establish a trailhead for day use only.
- Allow a more natural appearance to occur; revegetate large portions of the area with native drought-tolerant species.
- Explore options for reallocating the park's portion of river irrigation water to maintaining the flow and quantity of water in the Rio Grande.
- Allow the Barker House to deteriorate and if necessary remove for public safety.
- Manage most of the Rio Grande Village area following the backcounty nonwilderness prescription.

■ **Harte Ranch**
- Designate a substantial portion of Harte Ranch for a wilderness study and manage it following the wilderness prescription. Exclude the county road, landing strip with surrounding buildings, and mountain lodge from this study.
- Allow the remaining structures to deteriorate in place; if necessary for visitor safety, remove them.

■ **Christmas Mountains**
- Enlarge the park's boundary to include the Christmas Mountains and seek funds for land acquisition.

Now It is Your Turn!

The next step is to send us your comments on these preliminary alternatives, interpretive themes, visitor experience goals, and management prescriptions. You may like some but not all the elements of one alternative, or you may like a concept but disagree with the way we have translated that concept into actual visitor experiences or resource protection in the park. **We need to know the reasons for your likes and dislikes.** Maybe you have an entirely different vision that would solve major issues better than any of the alternatives presented. This is the kind of feedback that will help us formulate the best possible future for the park. We encourage all ideas. Please take time to fill out the enclosed comment form and return it within 30 days. We will consider your comments when we develop the *Draft General Management Plan*, which will include an analysis of the environmental consequences of implementing each of the alternatives. If you prefer, you may fill out a comment form via the Internet at:

http://www.nps.gov/planning/bibe/gmp/news2/home.htm

Also, please be aware that due to the requirements of public disclosure (318 Department Manual 4 App.2.11), the National Park Service must make the names and addresses of commenters public if requested. Individual respondents, however, may request that this information not be released. The National Park Service will then determine whether the information may be withheld under the Freedom of Information Act and will honor your request to the extent allowed by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection if requested.

THE APPROVED PLAN BECOMES REAL

Implementation of any approved alternative depends on funding. A general management plan provides analysis and justification for future funding, but in no way guarantees that money will be forthcoming. The plan will establish a vision that will guide year-to-year management of the park. Full implementation of the approved plan could take many years.

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